

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 3980

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT CA

SUBJECT: HOCHLEAGA AS A POSSIBLE NATIONAL INDICATOR

REF A) MONTREAL 1664; B) OTTAWA 3903 C) OTTAWA 3860

1. BEGIN SUMMARY; THE EMBASSY HAS GENERAL COMMENTS, FROM FEDERAL PERSPECTIVE, TO ADD TO EXCELLENT CONGEN COVERAGE (REF A) OF HOCHLEAGA ELECTION. EVEN FACTORING IN PURELY LOCAL CONSIDERATIONS, ELECTION HAD AT LEAST SOME NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AS A POSSIBLE INDICATOR OF INCREASED VOTER DISNECHANTMENT WITH PM TRUDEAU, HIS GOVERNMENT, AND HIS NEW ECONOMIC POLICIES. WHEN A PARTY LOSES A RIDING WHICH IT HAS HELD SOLIDLY FOR 54 YEARS AND THEIR CANDIDATE, PIERRE JUNEAU, BECOMES THE FIRST CABINET MINISTER IN 30 YEARS TO FAIL TO FIND A BACK-UP RIDING, IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THIS IS SOMEWHAT MORE THAN AN ENTIRELY LOCAL AFFAIR. END SUMMARY.

2. MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS PIERRE JUNEAU'S LOSS TO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE JACQUES LAVOIE HAS LEFT JUNEAU WITH SEVERAL UNFLATTERING DISTINCTIONS. HE IS THE FIRST LIBERAL TO LOSE THE HOCHLEAGA RIDING SINCE 1921. HE IS THE FIRST FEDERAL CABINET MINISTER WHO HAS BEEN UNABLE TO REST HIS PORFOLIO ON A PARLIAMENTARY SEAT SINCE SHORTLY AFTER WORLD WAR II. FINALLY, IF HE RESIGNS HIS MINISTRY AND THIS IS LIKELY, HE WILL SET A RECORD

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FOR BREVITY OF CABINET TENURE (49 DAYS AS OF OCT. 16).

3. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THE TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT'S NEW ECONOMIC POLICY (REF B), ANNOUNCED LITERALLY ON THE EVE OF THE ELECTION, HURT JUNEAU. MANY, HOWEVER, FEEL THAT IT DID REDUCE HIS VOTE AS THE LARGELY WORKING-CLASS ELECTORATE REACTED UNFAVORABLY TO THE WAGE AND PRICE RESTRAINTS. IF THIS IS THE CASE, AND WE TEND TO BELIEVE THAT IT IS, THIS ELECTION BECOMES THE FIRST ELECTORAL REACTION TO THE NEW POLICY.

4. THE RESULTS ARE A PERSONAL BLOW TO PM TRUDEAU. THE HOCHELAGA VOTERS WERE BEING ASKED TO PROVIDE A HOUSE SEAT FOR AN OUTSIDER WHOSE PRINCIPAL QUALIFICATION WAS THAT TRUDEAU HAD SUCH A HIGH REGARD FOR HIM AS TO SELECT HIM FOR A CABINET SEAT, AND TRUDEAU EXPECTED HOCHELAGA DUTIFULLY TO PROVIDE HIM A PARLIAMENTARY SEAT. VOTER REACTION THUS APPEARS TO BE IN PART A SLAP AT TRUDEAU. THE VOTERS DID NOT VOTE AGAINST JUNEAU THE MAN BUT, RATHER, AGAINST JUNEAU THE STRAWMAN TO SIGNIFICANT DEGREE.

5. EVEN BEFORE HOCHELAGA, OTTAWA POLITICAL OBSERVERS AND POLITICIANS, INCLUDING SOME LIBERALS, HAD BEEN SUGGESTING THAT NEXT MONTH'S LIBERAL BIENNIAL CONVENTION COULD BE EMBARRASSING TO TRUDEAU. PARTY RULES CALL FOR A SECRET BALLOT ON WHETHER TO HOLD A SUBSEQUENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE. NO ONE HAS SERIOUSLY SUGGESTED THAT THE VOTE WILL FORCE SUCH AN EVENT. BUT WITH TURNER'S RESIGNATION AND LACK OF TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP BEFORE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY, THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE LIBERAL CONCERN OVER THIS VOTE. THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY, AS A DEMONSTRATION OF FIRM TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP, MAY HAVE DEFUSED THIS ISSUE TO A DEGREE. HOWEVER, THE HOCHELAGA RESULT HAS CALLED INTO QUESTION TRUDEAU'S PREVIOUSLY UNQUESTIONED ABILITY TO DELIVER QUEBEC SEATS TO THE LIBERAL PARTY FOLD. THIS COULD REKINDLE DISENCHANTMENT WITH TRUDEAU WITHIN THE PARTY, AND IF THE NEW ECONOMIC PROGRAM IS SPUTTERING BY THE TIME OF THE CONVENTION, THE COMBINATION COULD RESULT IN AN EMBARRASSING (E.G. 20 PERCENT) VOTE IN FAVOR OF A LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, WHICH WOULD FURTHER TARNISH TRUDEAU'S LUSTRE.

6. TRUDEAU IS NOT THE ONLY NATIONAL FIGURE WHOSE REPUTATION WAS AFFECTED BY HOCHELAGA. IT DETRACTS FROM THE PRESTIGE OF HEALTH

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MINISTER MARC LALONDE, BEING HIS FIRST OUTING AS LEADER OF THE QUEBEC PROVINCIAL LIBERAL PARTY. IT REPRESENTS VINDICATION FOR PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE LEADER ROBERT STANFIELD WHO HAS LONG ARGUED AGAINST PC MINORITY VIEW THAT THE PC CAN IGNORE QUEBEC IN SEEKING NATIONAL CONTROL. HOCHELAGA SHOWS THAT A HARD-WORKING PC CANDIDATE WITH PROPER BACKING CAN WIN IN QUEBEC. FINALLY, HOCHELAGA PROVIDED A BOOST FOR QUEBEC PC MEMBER CLAUDE WAGNER, IN HIS EFFORTS TO REPLACE STANFIELD AS PC

PARTY LEADER.

7. WE ARE NOT SUGGESTING THAT TRUDEAU, WITH OR WITHOUT HOCHELAGA, IS IN IMMINENT DANGER OF LOSING HIS JOB. HIS POPULARITY, EVEN BEFORE HIS NEW ECONOMIC POLICY, WAS SURPRISINGLY HIGH (REF C) AND THE NEW POLICY PRESUMABLY HAS REGAINED FOR HIM SOME OF THAT ELUSIVE BUT IMPORTANT LEADERSHIP QUALITY. BUT THE NEW POLICY IS JUST THAT, NEW, AND IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW AND HOW WELL IT WILL WORK. IF IT DOES NOT GO WELL, THEN HOCHELAGA, WITH HINDSIGHT, MAY BE SEEN AS THE START OF A TREND.
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